22 Oct 1962
for 2 wks
to 5 Nov 1962

Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in October 1962, after U.S. intelligence reconnaissance flights verified reports that the USSR was constructing launching sites for medium-range and intermediate-range nuclear missiles on the island of Cuba. The USSR apparently hoped to achieve a more favorable balance of power, to protect the Cuban Communist government of Fidel Castro (which the United States had attempted to overthrow in the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961), to gain greater diplomatic leverage vis-a-vis the United States, to damage U.S. credibility, and to achieve greater influence in Latin America.

President John F. KENNEDY rejected military advice for a full-scale surprise attack on Cuba and instead delivered a public ultimatum to the USSR on October 22. He declared a "quarantine," or naval blockade, of Cuba and demanded withdrawal of all offensive missiles. After nearly two weeks of unprecedented tension, the Soviet government of Nikita Khrushchev yielded. Kennedy, in return, agreed to refrain from attempting an overthrow of Castro's government. Despite this concession, all sides regarded the outcome as a substantial victory for the United States, and Kennedy won a reputation as a formidable international statesman. The USSR began a long-term effort to strengthen its military capability, but in the immediate future both nations sought to relax hostilities.

In the late 1980s several unique conferences of U.S., Soviet, and Cuban officials and scholars contributed new revelations and perspective to the historical record of the crisis.

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